

The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

By ARTHUR B. REEVE

Well-Known Novelist and the Creator of the "Craig Kennedy" Stories

Presented in Collaboration With the Pathé Players and the Electric Film Company

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SYNOPSIS.

The New York police are mystified by a series of murders and other crimes. The prime suspect is the criminal in the wrap, who is sent to the victims, signed with a "clutching hand." The latest victim is the famous insurance president, Mr. Dodge, the insurance president. His daughter, Elaine, employs Craig Kennedy, the famous scientific detective, to try to unravel the mystery. What Kennedy accomplishes is told by his friend, Jennings, a newspaper man. Enraged at the determined effort which Elaine and Craig Kennedy are making to put an end to his crimes, the Clutching Hand, as this strange criminal is known, resorts to all sorts of the most diabolical schemes to put them out of the way. Each chapter of the story tells of a new plot against their lives and of the way the great detective uses all his skill to save this pretty girl and himself from death.

FIFTEENTH EPISODE

THE SERPENT SIGN.

Rescued by Kennedy at last from the terrible incubus of Bennett's persecution in his double life of lawyer and master criminal, Elaine had, for the first time in many weeks, a feeling of security.

Now that the strain was off, however, she felt that she needed rest and a chance to recover herself, and it had occurred to her that a few quiet days with "Aunt" Tabitha, who had been her nurse when she was a little girl, would do her a world of good.

She had sent for Aunt Tabby, yet the fascination of the experiences through which she had just gone still hung over her. She could not resist thinking and reading about them as she sat one morning with the faithful Rusty in the conservatory of the Dodge house.

I had told the story at length in the Star, and the heading over it had caught her eye.

THE CLUTCHING HAND DEAD.

Double Life Exposed by Craig Kennedy.

Perry Bennett, the Famous Young Lawyer, Takes Poison — Kennedy New on Trail of Master Criminal's Hidden Millions.

As Elaine glanced down the column Jennings announced that Aunt Tabby, as she loved to call her old friend, had arrived and was now in the library with Aunt Josephine.

With an exclamation of delight Elaine dropped the paper and, followed by Rusty, almost ran into the library.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you," half-jested Elaine, as she literally flung herself into her nurse's arms. "I feel as if I could just run off for a few days with you and Joshua in the country, where no one would know, it might make me feel better. You have always been so good to me, Marie! Are my things packed?" "Very well; then get my wraps."

Her maid left the room.

"Bless your soul," mothered Aunt Tabby, stroking her soft, golden hair. "I'm always glad to have you in that fine house you bought me. And, faith, Miss Elaine, the house is a splendid place to rest in, but I don't know what the matter with it lately. Joshua says it's haunted."

"Haunts?" repeated Elaine in amused surprise. "Why, what do you mean?"

Marie entered with the wraps before Aunt Tabby could reply, and Jennings followed with the baggage.

"Nonsense," continued Elaine gayly, as she put on her coat and turned to bid Aunt Josephine good-bye.

Elaine went out, followed by Rusty and Jennings with the luggage.

"Now for a long ride in the good fresh air," sighed Elaine, as she leaned back on the cushions of the Dodge limousine and patted Rusty, while the butler stowed away the bags.

The air certainly did, if anything, heighten the beauty of Elaine, and at last they arrived at Aunt Tabby's, tired and hungry.

The car stopped and Elaine, Aunt Tabby and the dog got out. There, waiting for them, was "Uncle" Joshua, as Elaine playfully called him, a former gardener of the Dodges, now a plain, honest countryman on whom the city was fast encroaching; a jolly old fellow, unharmed by the world.

Aunt Tabby was an attractive, small woman, not many miles from New York, yet not in the general line of suburban travel.

Kennedy and I had decided to bring Bennett's papers and documents over to the laboratory to examine them. We were now engaged in going over the great mass of material which he had collected in the hope of finding some clue to the stolen millions which he must have amassed as a result of his villainy. The table was stretched high.

A knock at the door told us that the expressman had arrived and a moment later he entered, delivering a heavy box. Kennedy signed for it and started to unpack it.

I was hard at work when I came

ing it on her, "take this—keep it near you!"

The noises ceased at length, as strangely as they had begun.

Half an hour later they had all gone back to bed and were asleep. But Elaine's sleep now was fitful, a constant procession of faces flitting before her closed eyes.

Suddenly she woke with a start and stared into the semi-darkness. Was that face real, or a dream face? Was it the hideous helmeted face that had dragged her down into the sewer once? That man was dead. Who was this?

She gazed at the bedroom window, holding the huge revolver tightly. There, vague in the night light, appeared a figure. Surely that was no dream face of the oxygen helmet. Besides, it was not the same helmet.

She sat bolt upright and fired point-blank at the window, shivering the glass. A second later she had leaped from the bed, switched on the lights and was running to the sill.

Downstairs Aunt Tabby and Uncle Joshua had heard the shot. Joshua was now wide awake.

"Wh-what was it?" he asked, puffing at the exertion of running up stairs.

"I saw—a face—at the window—with some kind of thing over it!" gasped Elaine. "It was like one I saw once before."

Uncle Joshua did not wait to hear any more. He ran out of the room and into the garden beneath Elaine's window.

He looked about for signs of an intruder. There was not a sound.

He happened to look down at the ground. Before him was a small box. He picked it up. "Here's something, though," he said.

Joshua went back to the house. "What's in it?" asked Elaine as he rejoined the woman.

She took the curious little box and unfasted the cover. As she opened it she drew back. There in the box was a little ivory figure of a man, all hunched up and shrunken, a hideous figure.

It was the afternoon following the day of our strange discovery of the fireplace done in sympathetic ink on the apparently blank sheet of paper

across a large manila envelope, carefully sealed, on which were written the figures "47,000,000." Too excited even to exclaim, I tore the envelope open and examined the contents.

Inside was another envelope. I opened that. It contained merely a blank piece of paper!

With characteristic skill at covering his tracks Bennett had also covered his money.

"Huh!" I snorted to myself, "confound him!"

I threw the paper into a wire basket on the desk and went on sorting the other stuff.

Kennedy had by this time finished unpacking the box and was examining a bottle which he had taken from it.

"Come here, Walter," he called at length. "Ever see anything like that?"

"I can't say," I confessed, getting up to go to him. "What is it?"

"Bring a piece of paper," he added. I went back to the desk where I had been working and looked about hastily. My eye fell on the blank sheet of paper which I had taken from Bennett's envelope, and I picked it up from the basket.

"Here's one," I said, handing it to him. "What are you doing?"

Kennedy did not answer directly, but began to treat the paper with the liquid from the bottle. Then he lighted a Bunsen burner and thrust the paper into the flame. The paper did not burn!

"A new system of fireproofing," laughed Craig, enjoying my astonishment.

He continued to hold the paper in the flame. Still it did not burn.

"See," he went on, withdrawing it and starting to explain the properties of the new fireproofing.

He had scarcely begun when he stopped in surprise. He had happened to glance at the paper again, bent over to examine it more intently and was now looking at it in surprise.

I looked also. There, clearly discernible on the paper, was a small part of what looked like an architect's drawing of a fireplace.

Craig looked up at me, nonplused. "Where did you say you got that?" he asked.

"It was a blank piece of paper among Bennett's effects," I returned, as mystified as he.

Kennedy said nothing, but thrust the paper back again into the flame. Slowly the heat of the burner seemed to bring out the complete drawing of the fireplace.

We looked at it, even more mystified. "What is it, do you suppose?" I queried.

"I think," he replied slowly, "that it was drawn with sympathetic ink. The heat of the burner brought it out into sight."

What about it?

Elaine had gone to bed that night at Aunt Tabby's in the room which her old nurse had fixed up especially for her.

Downstairs, in the living room, Rusty also was asleep, his nose between his paws.

The living room was in keeping with everything at Aunt Tabby's, plain, neat, homelike. On one side was a large fireplace that gave it an air of hospitality.

Suddenly Rusty woke up, his ears pointed at this fireplace. He stood a moment listening, then, with a bark of alarm he sped swiftly from the living room up the stairs at a bound until he came to Elaine's room.

Elaine felt his cold nose at her hand and stirred, then awoke.

"What is it, Rusty?" she asked, mindful of the former days when Rusty gave warning of the Clutching Hand and his emissaries.

Rusty wagged his tail. Something was wrong.

Elaine followed him down to the living room. She went over and lighted the electric lamp on the table, then turned to Rusty.

"Well, Rusty?" she repeated, almost as if he was human.

She had no need to repeat the question. Rusty was looking straight at the fireplace.

Elaine listened. Sure enough, she heard strange noises. Was that Aunt Tabby's "Haunt?" Whatever it was, it sounded as if it came up from the very depths of the earth.

She continued to listen in wonder, then ran to Aunt Tabby's bedroom door, on the first floor, and knocked.

Aunt Tabby woke up and shook Joshua.

"Aunt Tabby! Aunt Tabby!" called Elaine.

"Yes, my dear," answered the old nurse, now fully awake and straightening her cap. "Joshua!"

Together the old couple came out into the living room, still in their nightclothes, Joshua yawning sleepily.

"Here, Miss Elaine," he urged pres-

ing it on her, "take this—keep it near you!"

The noises ceased at length, as strangely as they had begun.

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Together the old couple came out into the living room, still in their nightclothes, Joshua yawning sleepily.

"Here, Miss Elaine," he urged pres-

Kennedy said nothing for a moment. Then he seized his hat and coat.

"If you don't mind," he said, "we'll go back there with you."

Wu Fang, the Chinese master mind, had arrived in New York.

Besides Wu, the inscrutable Long Sin, astute though he was, was a mere pigmy—his slave, his advance agent, as it were.

New York did not know of the arrival of Wu Fang, the mysterious, yet But down in the secret recesses of Chinatown, in the ways that are devious and dark, the oriental crooks knew and trembled.

Thus it happened that Long Sin was not permitted to enjoy even the foretaste of Bennett's spoils which he had forced from him after his weird transformation into his real self, the Clutching Hand, when the Chinaman had given him the poisoned draft that had put him into his long sleep.

He had obtained the paper showing where the treasure was hidden, but Wu Fang, his master, had come.

The night following his arrival, Wu Fang was reclining on a divan, when his servant announced that Long Sin was at the door.

"Have you brought the map with you?" asked Wu.

Long Sin bowed low again, and drew from under his coat the paper which he had obtained from Bennett. For a moment the two, master and slave in guise, bent over, closely studying it.

At one point of the map Long Sin's bony finger paused over a note which Bennett had made:

"Beware of poisoned gas upon opening compartment."

"And you think you can trace it out?" asked Wu.

"Without a doubt," bowed Long Sin. He went over to a bag near by, which he had already sent up by another servant, and opened it. Inside was an oxygen helmet. He replaced it, after showing it to Wu.

"With the aid of the science of the white devil," purred Long Sin subtly. Outside, Wu had already ordered a car to wait, and together the two drove off rapidly. Into the country they sped, until at last they came to a lonely turn in a lonely road.

Long Sin alighted and disappeared, canny rappings began to be heard.

We listened a moment, then Kennedy walked over to the fireplace. "You can explore it with me now, Walter," he said quietly, touching the lever and opening the panel which disclosed the ladder.

Together, Craig and I descended into the darkness about eight or ten feet. There we found a passageway, excavated through the earth and rock, along which we crept. It was crooked and uneven, and we stumbled, but kept going slowly ahead.

Kennedy, who was a few feet in front of me, stopped suddenly and I almost fell over him.

"What is it?" I whispered.

Long Sin had made his way from the opening of the cave to the point on the plan which was marked by a cross, and there he had set up his electric drill which was connected to the trolley wire. He was working furiously to take advantage of the fifteen minutes or so before the next car would pass.

It was evident that Long Sin had already been at work, digging and drilling through the earth and rock. He had gone so far now that he had disclosed what looked like the face of a small safe set directly into the rock.

As he worked he would stop from time to time and consult the map. Then he would take up drilling again.

He had now come to the point on which Bennett had written his warning. Quickly he opened the bag and took the oxygen helmet, which he adjusted carefully over his head. Then he set to work with redoubled energy.

The man must have heard us approaching down the tunnel, for he paused in his work and the noise of the drill ceased.

From our vantage point around the bend in the passageway we could see this strange and uncouth figure.

"Who is it, do you think?" I whispered, crouching back against the wall for fear that he might look even around a corner or through the earth and discover us.

As I spoke my hand loosened a piece of rock that jutted out and before I knew it there was a crash.

"Confound it, Walter," exclaimed Kennedy.

Down the passageway the figure was now thoroughly on the alert, starting with his goggle-like eyes into the blackness in our direction. He was watched, and he did not hesitate a minute to act.

He seized the bag and picked his way quickly through the passage as if he thoroughly familiar with every turn of the walls and roughness of the floor.

Kennedy dashed forward and I followed close after him.

We were making much better time than our strange visitor and were gaining on him rapidly.

Suddenly he turned, raised his arm and dashed something to the earth, much as a child explodes a toy torpedo. I fully expected that it was a bomb; but, as a moment later, I found that Kennedy and I were still unharmed, I knew that it must be some other product of this devilish genius.

"A Chinese smoke bomb!" sputtered and coughed Kennedy, as he retreated a minute, then with renewed vigor endeavored to penetrate the dense and opaque fumes.

We managed to go ahead still, but the intruder had exploded one after another of his peculiar bombs, always keeping ahead of the smoke which he created, and we found that under its cover he had made good his escape.

At the other end of the passageway, up in the living room of the cottage, the draft had carried large quantities of the smoke.

Long Sin, meanwhile, had started to work his way through the bushes to reach the waiting car, with Wu, then paused and listened. Hearing no sound, he replaced the helmet, which he had taken off.

Pursuit was now useless for us. With revolvers drawn, we crept back along the passageway until we came again to the chamber itself. There, on the floor, lay a bag of tools, opened, as though somebody had been working with them.

"Caught red-handed!" exclaimed Kennedy with great satisfaction.

He looked at the tools a minute and then at the electric drill, and finally an idea seemed to strike him. He took up a drill and advanced toward the safe. Then he turned on the current and applied the drill.

The drill was of the very latest design and it went quickly through the steel. But beyond that there was another thin steel partition. This Kennedy tackled next.

The drill went through and he withdrew it.

Instantly the most penetrating and nauseous odor seemed to pervade everything. Kennedy cried out. We staggered back, overcome by the escaping gas, and fell to the ground.

Long Sin with his oxygen helmet on again, had returned to the passageway and was now stealthily creeping back.

He came to the chamber and there discovered us lying on the ground overcome. He bent down and, to his great satisfaction, saw that we were really unconscious.

Quickly he moved over to the safe and pried open the last thin steel plate.

Inside was a small box. He picked it up and tried to open it, but it was locked.

He paused for a moment to look at us, then took out a piece of paper and a pencil and on the paper wrote: "Thanks for your trouble."

Beneath it was signed by his special stamp—the serpent's head, mouth open and fangs showing.

Long Sin looked at us a moment, then a subtle smile seemed to spread over his face. At last he had his in his power.

He drew a long, wicked-looking Chinese knife